Lafayette Historical Society
NEWSLETTER

P.O. Box 133, Lafayette, California 94549

Bulletin Vol. XV, No. 1 January 1988
President: Oliver Hamlin - Phone (days): 283-6822 Editor: Shirley Thomson - Phone (days): 930-9050

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

January 25, 1988

Dear Friends,

This is the first newsletter of the year, and we send our best wishes to our Lafayette members for 1988.

I would like to report that we had a very successful field trip to Benicia on November 7, a tour personally conducted by our own Ruth Dyer and Elizabeth Johnston. We saw things and places there which most people overlook in that historic area. How many of you have visited the historic Camel Barn Museum in Benicia? It was a very enjoyable outing for those who were aboard. More of you should try these bus trips sometime; you'll like them.

Our next event will be the EUGENE O'NEILL CENTENNIAL PROGRAM on Sunday, February 21, 1988, at 3:00 p.m. at the Lafayette Community Center on St. Mary's Road. Please mark your calendar for that date and plan to attend and bring a friend if you can. It is also a good opportunity to see the Community Center. It should be a very interesting and professionally presented program. (Did you know that Eugene O'Neill was once a Lafayette resident?)

Also, mark your calendar for the second Tuesday of May--May 10, 1988. That's the date for our ANNUAL MEETING AND POTLUCK DINNER. More about this later--but do save the date.

I hope to see you on February 21.

Best regards,

Ollie Hamlin

Oliver D. Hamlin

OFFICERS, COMMITTEE CHAIRS

President	Oliver Hamlin
Vice Pres.	
Rec. Sec.	Ruth Dyer
Cor. Sec.	
Treas.	Irene van Overveen
Archives	Betsy Willcuts
Fire Engine	George Wasson
Landmarks	James Craig
Membership	Lee Schell
Newsletter	Shirley Thomson
Clippings	Peggy Craig
Plaza Park Rep.	Ray Peters
Ann. Potluck	Richard Johnson
Program	Elizabeth Johnston
Publicity	Sandy Kimball
Publication Sales	Ruth Dyer

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MEMBERSHIP DUES - 1988

You will find a membership renewal form in this issue. Membership is now based on the calendar year. Membership dues, therefore, are due this month.

Family membership	$ 5.00
Student membership	$ 2.50
Business membership	$ 50.00
Life membership	$100.00

Please send your check and the membership form to LHS Membership, P.O. Box 133, Lafayette 94549.

Please let us know if you have a change of address or if we've made an error in your name or address as shown on the newsletter label.

Please indicate on the membership form your areas of interest; we need your involvement, your energy and ideas. We welcome your willingness to be an active member.

RESEARCHING OR WRITING LOCAL HISTORY?

There are surely many history writers among LHS members. If you are working on an area of local history that you feel might be of interest to the membership, call Newsletter Editor Shirley Thomson (930-9050 or 284-2995).

With our thanks to Ray Peters, we are featuring in this issue a short piece based on an 1851 letter that Ray discovered when he was doing some survey research in Sacramento some years ago.

ADDRESSES OF LOCAL HISTORICAL SOCIETIES

Concord Historical Society
P.O. Box 404, Concord, CA 94522

Contra Costa County Historical Society
P.O. Box 821, Concord, CA 94522

Martinez Historical Society
P.O. Box 14, Martinez, CA 94553

Moraga Historical Society
P.O. Box 103, Moraga, CA 94556

Orinda Historical Society
P.O. Box 82, Orinda, CA 94563

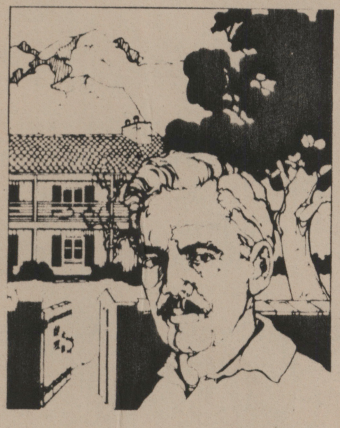
Pleasant Hill Historical Society
P.O. Box 23675, Pleasant Hill, CA 94523

San Ramon Valley Historical Society
P.O. Box 521, Danville, CA 94526

EUGENE O'NEILL CENTENNIAL COMMEMORATED IN FEBRUARY PROGRAM

On Sunday, February 21, at 3:00 the Society will present Kerri Shawn and Richard James in a program based on five of O'Neill's plays. The 45-minute dramatic presentation--"Eugene O'Neill: Tao House Legacy to the American Theatre"--is made up of excerpts from the plays O'Neill completed during his Contra Costa years. The dramatic production is introduced and linked by an informative and entertaining narrative prepared by O'Neill scholar Travis Bogard.

Actors Shawn and James have often shared the spotlight as members of Walnut Creek's Civic Arts Repertory Company. Richard James played Salieri in the company's production of "Amadeus," and he will play the main character, Con Melody, in O'Neill's "A Touch of the Poet" which opens January 29. Kerri Shawn is the winner of two Shelly Awards. She will play a role in "A Touch of the Poet."



Join us at the Lafayette Community Center

at 3:00 PM, Sunday, February 21, for an

afternoon celebrating Eugene O'Neill.

TAO HOUSE, O'NEILL'S DANVILLE HOME

A visit to Eugene O'Neill National Historic Site would surely add to one's understanding of the playwright. His Danville home, which he called his "final home and harbor," is open to those interested in preparing for the February program or following up on it later.

The site was once part of the great Pacheco Rancho and then a part of the Bryant farm. The O'Neills purchased 157 acres and began to build Tao House in 1937. It is now operated by the National Park Service and is open seven days a week for tours twice daily (10:00 AM and 1:30 PM).

Access to the site is limited. The only public access permitted is by way of an eleven-passenger van that makes two round trips daily. The transportation is offered by the National Park Service; there is no charge for the transportation or tour. However, TOURS ARE AVAILABLE BY RESERVATION ONLY. Call 415/838-0249 for your reservation for a guided tour of the house and a self-guiding tour of the grounds. (You will need sturdy walking shoes!)

OTHER LOCAL EVENTS OF INTEREST TO O'NEILL FANS

Civic Arts Repertory, Walnut Creek -- "A Touch of the Poet," Jan. 29 through Feb. 17, 943-5862.

St. Mary's College, Moraga -- "Eugene O'Neill: A Centennial Symposium," includes lectures, films and the Civic Arts Repertory's production of "A Touch of the Poet."

Dramateurs, Town Hall Theatre, Lafayette -- O'Neill's play, "Anna Christie," awarded the Pulitzer Prize in 1922, Sept. 30 - Nov. 5.

Diablo Valley College -- "Take Me Along," a musical version of "Ah Wilderness!" Oct. 21 - Nov. 6.

One-Act Theatre Company, 430 Mason St., San Francisco -- "Jimmy Tomorrow," an original play by Michael Lynchy, based on O'Neill's only published short story, "Tomorrow," which includes many characters in "The Iceman Cometh."

Magic Theatre, Fort Mason Center, San Francisco -- O'Neill's play, "A Moon for the Misbegotten," March 22 - April 24.

California State University, Hayward -- O'Neill's "The Great God Brown," Nov. 17-26.

City College of San Francisco -- "Mourning Becomes Electra," Sept. 16 - Nov. 6.

MARCH BOARD MEETING

Business meeting of the board of directors and committee chairs is scheduled to be held at Ray Peters' home, 1324 Martino Road, Lafayette, at 7:30 pm, on Tuesday, March 8. Call Ray (284-4124) if you need directions.

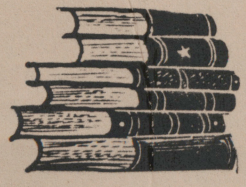
Call Ollie Hamlin (283-6822, days; 284-1446 evenings) if you would like to place an item on the agenda. LHS members welcome.

CONFERENCE OF CALIFORNIA HISTORICAL SOCIETIES TO MEET IN CONTRA COSTA COUNTY

The Contra Costa County Historical Society will host the Conference of California Historical Societies June 23, 24 and 25, 1988. The 34th annual meeting which is expected to bring together more than two hundred member historians will be headquartered at the Concord Inn.

CCCHS President Betty Maffei has extended an invitation to fellow historians in Lafayette and other local societies to participate in the event.

Members of local historical societies are welcomed and encouraged to help on host group committees. Those working on the conference will not be subject to registration fees. Members interested in being a part of a working committee should send their names, addresses, phone numbers, committees preferred and include local historical society affiliation. Working committees include Registration, Tours, Luncheons and Dinners, Hospitality Room and Panel Discussions. Further information can be obtained by calling 939-9180.



MORAGA'S PRIDE -- NEW LOCAL HISTORY

Sandy Kimball's new book, *Moraga's Pride: Rancho Laguna de los Palos Colorados*, was published in December by the Moraga Historical Society.

Moraga's Pride documents the history of the rancho which encompassed nearly half of modern Lafayette. It surely will be of interest to many LHS readers. Early reviews note Sandy's careful research and fine writing. The book is richly illustrated.

Lafayette Historical Society

POST OFFICE BOX 133 LAFAYETTE, CALIF. 94549

APPLICATION FOR MEMBERSHIP

last name _____ first name _____ spouse's first name _____

street address _____ city, state, zip code _____

phone _____ date _____

ANNUAL DUES: Please check appropriate box, attach check in the amount shown and mail to Lafayette Historical Society, P.O. Box 133, Lafayette, CA 94549.

[ ] Family membership ($5)
[ ] Student membership ($2.50)
[ ] Business membership ($50)
[ ] Life membership ($100)

ACTIVITIES OF THE SOCIETY

- *Collect, preserve, and make available to researchers and the public Lafayette's records, historic materials, photographs*
- *Disseminate historical information and encourage public interest in local history through programs, exhibits, field trips*
- *Provide care and maintenance of Lafayette's early fire engine, "Old Betsy"*
- *Identify and place markers at historic sites*
- *Publications*
- *Conduct walking tours*
- *Record and maintain oral histories*

PLEASE CHECK YOUR AREAS OF INTEREST

[ ] Historic preservation
[ ] Landmarks
[ ] Oral history
[ ] Research
[ ] Typing
[ ] Other_____

[ ] Field trips
[ ] Photograph collection
[ ] Newspaper clippings
[ ] Telephone committee
[ ] Annual potluck dinner

VIEW FROM THE TOP

by Ray Peters

On July 11, 1851, a little sloop set sail from San Francisco, bound for Benicia. On board were Leander Ransom and three assistants, along with provisions, tools and camp equipage.

California had already been a State of the Union for ten months and two days, but Lafayette hadn't yet been named, for Benjamin Shreve was still on his way.

Two houses existed along Jones Creek (Happy Valley Creek) in the Rancho Acalanes, one built by Elam Brown and the other by his good friend Nathaniel Jones. Elam operated a small grist mill there, for the nearest otherwise was all the way down to San Jose.

When Ransom arrived in Benicia that July evening, he hired two more men and borrowed some horses and mules from Major Allen at the Quartermaster's Department. They set sail to Martinez, then up the creek (Walnut Creek) to a landing they called "the Embarcadero" (Pacheco).

From the embarcadero they conveyed their camp equipage to Bishop's Ranch, near the foot of Mt. Diablo on the west side, where they encamped (all in one breathless day, so Ransom reported).

Leander Ransom was a Deputy Surveyor of the United States, and he was under instructions to establish an east and west base line and a north and south meridian line through the prominent peak of Mt. Diablo. These base and meridian lines were to be used to establish the subdivision of "public" lands in much of California, lands which are to be considered separate from "private" lands such as the ranchos previously granted by Mexico or Spain.

Elam Brown wasn't much interested in Ransom and his surveying, for the Rancho Acalanes was a private grant and outside the public jurisdiction. However, when Ransom finally reached the summit of the mountain on a hot, dry July day, "the day being exceptionally hot, the thermometer standing at full 100 in the shade, we suffered very considerably from heat, and some from the want of water," he looked down to Elam Brown's holdings.

Ransom described what he saw: "At a distance of seven miles west of the mountain this valley (Pacheco) is broken by spurs of ridges, and narrowing from one and a half to a half mile in width, it extends in a southeast direction until it reaches Amido's Ranch. . . . These valleys and the ravines and hills surrounding them are mostly covered with thick set wild oats, growing from four inches to as many feet in height. . . . These wild oats afford abundant pasturage to the extensive droves of cattle and horses that are scattered over this magnificent range, and also, to herds of elk, antelope and deer that abound here. One herd of elk that we saw on the mountain numbered at least 200."

Ransom also pointed out that due to "gold fever," goods in California were somewhat more expensive than in other parts of the country. He provided a comparison of some prices (see table).

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[From a letter of September 20, 1851, to Saml. D. King, Esq., Surveyor General of the United States for the State of California, from Deputy Surveyor Leander Ransom.]

In 1851 . . .	California Prices	Michigan Prices
Steamboat fare, per mile	$0.05	$0.01
Potatoes, per bushel	3.50	.25
Beans, per bushel	4.00	.63
Bacon, per pound	.20	.04
Milk, per quart	.25	.03
Cornmeal, per bushel	2.25	.25

LAFAYETTE HISTORICAL SOCIETY WINTER PROGRAM

"Eugene O'Neill: Tao House Legacy to the American Theatre"

A Civic Arts Repertory Company Production
Presented by
Kerri Shawn and Richard James

Sunday, February 21, 1988
at the
LAFAYETTE COMMUNITY CENTER - 3:00 PM

For more information: Call 284-4286

Lafayette Historical Society
1062 Via Baja
Lafayette, CA 94549

FIRST CLASS MAIL